



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Massachusetts State Office

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Farmland and forest land owners: start planning now for conservation needs

\$13 million in federal assistance is available in Massachusetts through 2008 Farm Bill

AMHERST, MA (February 25, 2009) — Sign-up is underway for federal conservation programs under the 2008 Farm Bill and in order to participate, a conservation plan is required. Anyone who owns or manages farmland or forest land in Massachusetts and would like technical or financial assistance to protect their natural resources is urged to contact their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office soon to begin the planning process.

Applications for Farm Bill conservation programs may be submitted at any time, but May 1, 2009 is the cut-off date for the first round of ranking and funding in Massachusetts. USDA service center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov.

“NRCS conservation professionals will discuss with you your conservation objectives, help you identify resource concerns and suggest alternatives for treatment,” said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. “They will also identify conservation programs that may provide you with financial help for implementation of certain practices. Massachusetts has been allocated more than \$13 million for financial assistance this year.”

New conservation provisions in the recently passed Farm Bill (the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008) simplify existing programs and create new programs to address high priority environmental protection goals such as pollinator habitat, wildlife and energy. For example, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) now includes more forestry practices. In Massachusetts, EQIP is also available to help greenhouse operations with water quality and conservation practices and to help aquaculture operations with best management practices.

The 2008 Farm Bill provides additional incentives for landowners who are beginning, have limited resources, or who are socially disadvantaged because they belong to racial or ethnic groups that have historically been subjected to prejudice. Such landowners can receive up to 90 percent of the costs associated with planning and implementing conservation measures and up to 30 percent of expected costs may be provided in advance.

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With financial and technical assistance from NRCS, farmers and other landowners promote environmental quality on farmland and forest land, address water quality and quantity challenges, and protect valuable wetland ecosystems and wildlife habitat. Among the voluntary conservation programs authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill are:

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** – EQIP helps farmers and forest landowners address water quality, water conservation, invasive species control, soil quality, erosion control, nutrient and pest management, residue management, irrigation efficiency, energy conservation, air quality and other natural resource concerns.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** – WHIP provides assistance to landowners who want to improve fish and wildlife habitat or restore natural ecosystems on their land.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** – WRP offers an opportunity for landowners to voluntarily protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property.
- **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)** – AMA helps farmers adopt conservation practices and investment strategies that will reduce or mitigate risks to their agricultural enterprises. In Massachusetts, cost-share is available to producers for drought mitigation.
- **Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)** – GRP is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property.

NRCS has offices in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham, which work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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NOTE TO EDITORS/REPORTERS: If you would like to include local contact information, please use the office below that serves your area.

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